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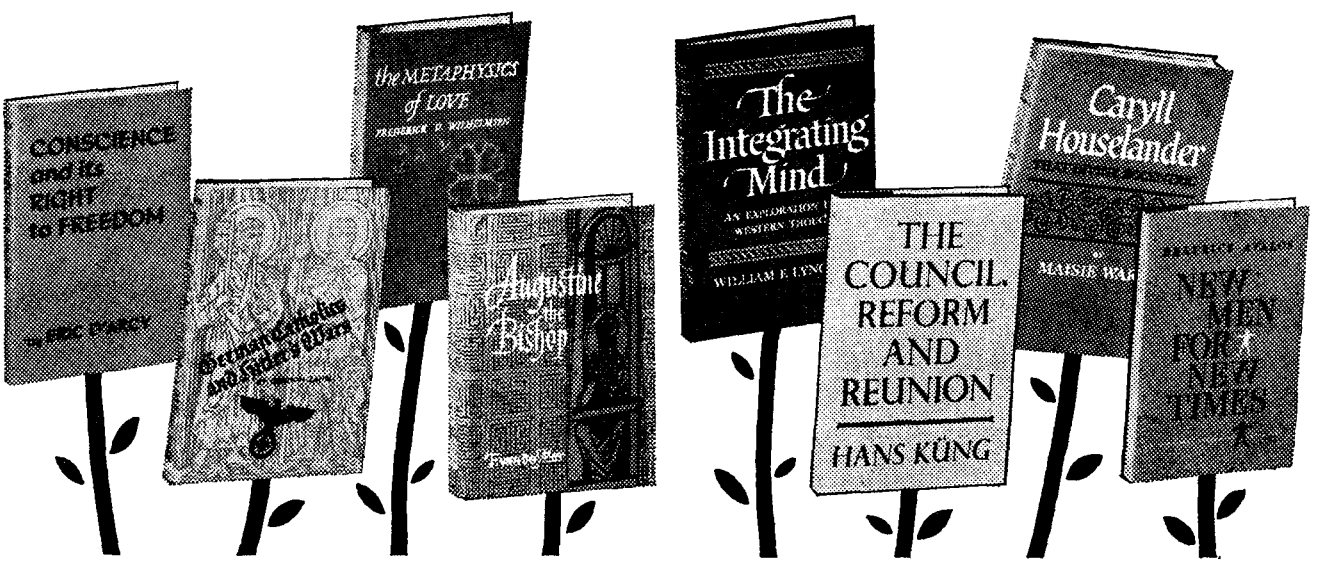

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THE COMMONWEAL

A WEEKLY REVIEW OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Need for a Fresh Start

THE NEW American thermonuclear test series will undoubtedly increase materially the proficiency and versatility of our offensive and defensive capabilities. It is soon to be followed by a new Soviet series. Even if the race should stop there—which is by no means certain—the capacities for mutual destruction will be staggering. Yet, after three and a half years, negotiations at Geneva appear to be as deadlocked as ever. Could the need for better understanding be more urgently underlined?

Doubtless the Kennedy Administration and the Khrushchev entourage do understand each other fairly well. The Russian leader has a rather pat formula for achieving world domination: "peaceful co-existence" would preclude war between states while the Soviet Union, conscious of its military might, encourages social revolution and supports "national wars of liberation" the world over. Khrushchev, the Moscow radio and the Soviet press vary in tone from friendly words to harsh denunciation. But Americans can hardly expect to learn much about their Russian counterparts from propaganda.

Is understanding attainable between the Russian and American peoples themselves? Admittedly it is not easy to find out much from behind an Iron Curtain which permits the circulation of *Amerika* as our only periodical. But with all the information about Russia available we ourselves know very little.

One obstacle we encounter is their predominantly peasant background. The suspicion and propensity for secrecy invariably manifested by Soviet emissaries goes back not only to their revolutionary origins but also to the Russian peasant's savage struggle for existence. This has bred certain martial qualities which the Communists have successfully exploited.

The need to concentrate on producing life's necessities has produced a cult of work beyond Western imagination. Under the Soviets it means that even today women make up forty-eight per cent of the Russian work force; with governmental care for children, Russian women both in city and countryside are widely utilized for hard manual labor. There are also many in the professions.

Education is undertaken in a similar spirit. It is a far more serious business than we make it over here. It combines the acquisition of useful knowledge with a Marxist indoctrination which isolates Russian youth from the ideas of his contemporaries. Only in the universities, apparently, do certain students become cynical enough to manifest doubts.

THE RUSSIAN Orthodox Church today presents something of a puzzle. To say that with its fifty million believers Soviet Russia has proportionately as many Christians as many Western nations may be statistically correct but can be highly misleading. The Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union finds itself against the wall. This year, for example, the Russian Easter was made a regular working day and teams of Young Communists were dispatched to harass the solemn religious ceremonies. A high percentage of the communicants is middle-aged or older, but in spite of forty years of persecution by a hostile dictatorship, the Orthodox Church in Russia manifests remarkable vitality. And its new contacts through the World Council of Churches constitute a most hopeful link with other Christians.

Happily, there also exists a certain amount of intercultural penetration. Over here the Russian classical authors of the nineteenth century are widely read. We know about the writings of Pasternak, Sholokhov and other Russian contemporaries. Informative volumes about the U.S.S.R. are plentiful. Various Russian ballet troupes amaze American audiences with their precision and energy. In recent years several distinguished films have brought us glimpses of current Soviet life. And, without passing judgment on the merits of our own cultural exports, there has been a certain interchange.

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Obviously, we could be less complacent and more curious about the peoples of the Soviet Union. That they are said to be extremely curious about us and our living standards is a hopeful sign.

Another is Khrushchev's present no-war stance. This could provide a certain breathing space in which to develop understanding between the two peoples. It could present us with an opportunity to acknowledge their not inconsiderable achievements and to lessen their personal fears without yielding to the Kremlin's continuing ambitions.

Perhaps under the threat of our common destruction, it will be possible to seek greater understanding between our two peoples. Even though the atmosphere in Russia is now less tense, we cannot expect this to come about by itself; there are too many obstacles in both camps. It can be reached only through a conscious effort boldly initiated from this side. The alternative is the continuing confrontation of two wholly hostile worlds, ignorant and suspicious of each other and each with poised thermonuclear weapons.

Ogres, Imaginary and Otherwise

DEPICTING President Kennedy as the oppressor of widows and orphans because of his vigorous stand against Big Steel is silly, of course. Like most of the big business and Republican criticism of Presidential action in the steel dispute, cries that Mr. Kennedy was trying to destroy private enterprise, the profit system and the free market that made America great seem to miss the whole point of the Kennedy-U.S. Steel debacle.

The fact is that the investigations launched by the Administration were aimed at the sudden and simultaneous price rises, of exactly the same amount, by supposedly independent steel companies. Quite apart from any question of bad faith or misrepresentation, Big Steel's action certainly seemed to indicate the possibility of collusion and price-rigging in the industry—just the opposite of the free-market, supply and demand operations so loudly invoked by big business apologists. The steel companies, furthermore, were forced to roll back their prices not because of government fiat but precisely because of competitive pressure from the smaller steel companies that did not go along with the price hike.

Similarly, the recent indictment of U.S. Steel and Bethlehem Steel under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act had nothing to do with the new contract and the collision with the President over the subsequent price rise. The indictments have been in process for years, and like last year's anti-trust case against

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twenty-nine electrical companies, had to do with alleged price-rigging in supposedly competitive bids by supposedly independent companies.

Thus the reflex outcry by conservative spokesmen —that the President's action in the steel dispute was a blow against free enterprise—actually reverses the elements in the situation. Having said that, however, we can agree that there are real grounds for concern in recent economic-industrial developments. In the first place, the absence of any provision for consideration of "the general good" in labor-management contests becomes more and more serious as a deficiency in our "free enterprise" system. It becomes more and more obvious that well-organized economic groups, such as management and labor in a particular industry, are able to agree to "raises" for themselves at the expense of less well-organized groups in the nation, or at the expense of clear national goals.

Some kind of voice for the general public or the national interest in major economic decision-making is a growing necessity, unquestionably. It is also unquestionable—as both President Eisenhower and President Kennedy have discovered—that in an acquisitive, profit-based society, mere pious exhortation to "restraint" and "responsibility" is not going to be effective. But at the same time there are clear dangers in a trend toward government "intervention" which is sporadic, undefined and dependent almost wholly on the personalities of the government officials involved.

The public interest needs to be represented somehow in industrial decisions which by reason of size and nature pass over the line of private responsibility. National goals need to be protected from the contradictions and confusions of economic activities which work at cross purposes. And yet freedom and personal initiative must be safeguarded from the smothering ministrations of the corporate state. The accomplishment of these delicately-balanced purposes requires careful, deliberate and firmly defined procedures. It can not be left to happenstance, muddling through, or the inclinations of a particular Chief Executive.

A Significant Gesture

THOUGH WE can count relatively few Nobel Prize winners among our staff, none to be exact, it was very gratifying to read of President Kennedy's recent dinner in their honor. While it could hardly be said that their achievements go unrecognized in America, neither could it be said that they are popular heroes. About the only name most Americans would recognize on the guest list would be that of Colonel John H. Glenn, Jr., who was also honored. Of course, an exception might be made for the names of Linus C. Pauling and J. Robert Oppenheimer—though few would know of their significance as scientists.

The important thing, however, is that the President chose to honor them just as, in the past, he has honored artists, writers and musicians. Naturally, it is impossible to guess what the impact of such recognition on the public will be. Nor can one say with any assurance that the President's initiative is indicative of a popular cultural renascence. Still, in a land where publicity, Presidential favor and public image count for much, the cause of intellectual and cultural progress is bound to be helped a little. Not many, we guess, will be able to resist the image of a resplendent Jacqueline Kennedy rubbing elbows with black-tied scientists. How much status can you get?

Archbishop Shehan's Lead

IF VITALITY and progress could be measured by talk and discussion, one might easily think that the lay movement in the American Church has been an astounding success. No doubt the frequent articles, pastorals and encouraging words from all sides indicate an important change in climate; no doubt, too, persistent discussion and exhortation help prepare the way for concrete action. Yet as soon as one casts about for some evidence that the voice of the laity is being heard and pondered, one finds that the achievements are scanty.

For that reason, two recent announcements by Archbishop Lawrence J. Shehan of Baltimore have a special importance. First, in January Archbishop Shehan announced the formation of an archdiocesan Commission on Christian unity. The establishment of the Commission was, in itself, something of an ecumenical milestone. Equally important, however, was the appointment of two laymen as consultors to the Commission. Secondly, a few weeks ago Archbishop Shehan announced the formation of thirteen special commissions to prepare for a forthcoming archdiocesan synod. To aid the commissions in their work, the Archbishop invited the laity to make their opinions known; and he provided a specific channel through which they could do so.

By his actions, Archbishop Shehan has underscored the importance not only of the laity but, more particularly, the necessity of formal means by which the laity's voice can be heard. There is simply no use in urging the laity to play a more active role in the Church if precise, formal means are not established by which he can do so. For the layman

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to be genuinely effective, for his voice to be heard clearly, structure and organization are needed. In the end, only the bishops can provide such a structure.

While it is very probable that other bishops will follow Archbishop Shehan's lead, the outcome of this development will depend on what the bishops come to expect of the laity. The worst possible outcome would be to conceive of the laity merely as a potentially strong pressure group, in need only of guidance to make them a fearsome political power. Almost as bad would be a conception of the laity which limited their role solely to that of amplifying the bishop's pre-determined decisions.

On the contrary, there are numerous occasions when the laity can make constructive comments on the decisions themselves. The laity can be consulted not only after a decision has been made but before as well. If the bishops come to see the value of prior consultation—and Archbishop Shehan has pointed the way—the useful talk about the laity can be converted into decisive progress.

Michel de Ghelderode: 1898–1962

MICHEL DE GHELDERODE is almost solely responsible for my devotion to dramatic art. He has meant much to me in the past. Through him I have come closer to understanding the values of the theater, literature, and life. And in the years to come I suspect he will signify even more than he already has.

As we come to grips with life, his philosophy, for those who know him, will remind us that art and life are the heralds of the soul. Their purposes are to break down the prison of the soul, to free us from bondage to ourselves. Ghelderode admonishes us that art brings us that vivid sense of other lives, and when we feel that the lives of others are as precious to them as our lives are to us, we have discovered art's secret. "What is life for," Ghelderode has asked, "if not to make us share a common consciousness?"

I came to know these Ghelderode secrets during 1959 and 1960 when I spent a year in Brussels expressly to study his drama and his life. When Ghelderode had gotten acquainted with me and had seen me at work, he gave me a nickname which stuck: *"rêveur d'action,"* a dreamer who likes getting things done. "After all," he joked, "you're an American who knows naturally what enterprise is all about."

Although Ghelderode pretended not to be a practical man of action but only a dreamer, he was in fact the shrewdest, most practical and frugal man imaginable. Until I sent him airmail stationery and stamps and insisted he use that medium, he had never sent a letter by airplane. Why? (His version:) "I mistrust airplanes, those monstrous birds." (My version:) "Too expensive." He didn't contradict me.

Yet Ghelderode was never stingy with other human beings, only himself. He sent me back to New York with a full trunk of souvenirs from my year in Belgium, a mixture of junk (a ten-cent-store rubber mermaid doll which wiggles, plastic toys, a plaster of paris corncob pipe), unclassifiable objects (a red Flemish fox's head, turtle shells, dried violets and red Belgium poppies found in Flanders Fields), and priceless souvenirs (hand-written manuscripts, out-of-print editions of his works, letters, paintings, and photos).

Although there is in this country a considerable group interested in Ghelderode's drama, I know of only one other American who had the privilege of visiting him and his wife Jeanne in their home in Schaerbeek, a part of old Brussels. That fact is remarkable when one considers how many hundreds of Americans have worked or been acquainted with authors of Ghelderode's stature, playwrights such as Anouilh, O'Casey, Giraudoux, Sartre, Brecht, and Claudel. But Ghelderode was an invalid and a recluse who made only one public appearance in the last twenty-five years of his life (that to accept his first international tribute presented by several countries in Ostend, Belgium, July 1960). However, the two Americans who did penetrate behind the tall, dark green, almost impregnable doors of Ghelderode's eighteenth century home into Ghelderode's "fantastic" world have agreed that he influenced our lives more than any other person.

Ghelderode's *petit-salon-musée* was filled with Ensor masks (a painter with whom he seemed to have a remarkable artistic equivalence), several Spanish and Italian crucifixes, large marionette dolls, sea shells and stuffed fish, cheap department store mannequins some of which were nude and some dressed in various roles of the stage (Hamlet and Isolde stood side by side), two carousel horses, Ghelderode posters, photos, and dozens of paintings in as many styles. Despite the theatricality of all this, we breathed in that atmosphere the quintessence of love: Michel and Jeanne de Ghelderode's love for each other, for life, and for us. That feeling of love, we concluded, was why our visits were remarkable.

The Ghelderodes never concerned themselves with what our titles were, what ancestors we claimed, or what our bank accounts contained. But they cared deeply about us as human beings. "We wanted to know," Ghelderode wrote later, "what your essence was—what you were like under your masks."

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I was saddened, even alarmed, when I first saw Ghelderode on October 10, 1959. Breathing heavily, he came shuffling into the room. From time to time he heaved asthmatically. He was thin. His face looked old, worn, and apprehensive, but he smiled and shook my hand with such force I was taken aback. Any one of his puppet dolls hanging from the walls looked stronger than he so that I wasn't prepared for his forthright hand clasp, but for this he evidently liked to be known. Thus in closing the first few letters he sent me during my stay in Brussels, Ghelderode wrote: "I send kind greetings and shake your hand firmly, yours, M. de G." Because of his widespread reputation for "other-worldliness," he liked to startle his guests with the incongruity of a warm, solid hand.

His first words to me were: "You're my *Christopher Columbus* [one of his best-liked plays] come home. He laughed a lot at your Buffalo Bill and dancing Indians," Ghelderode continued. "He wanted to stay in America, but alas, his people insisted he return to be made into a statue. My Christopher was not an explorer but an escapist, a dreamer who wanted to get away from it all . . . as I do."

With those last three words, Ghelderode made a sweeping gesture with his arm, encompassing the whole room, declaring: "You see, I am a great *collectioneur*. Everything here has a private meaning to me. These objects symbolize my world. You will like Borak (a large handsome gray carousel horse) and one night we will sit astride him—if he gets to like you." Though I petted Borak I never rode him, but one of my favorite photos of Ghelderode is of him sitting gaily on the horse's back, looking like a happy child.

After Ghelderode's initial greeting to me concerning Christopher Columbus, the playwright was more like an actor playing a rather pompous part, his speech being rather ornate and formal. Most of it concerned his precious *objects;* the rest I can't remember now. But after his long monologue, he admitted that he had "pronounced" it in order to impress me. After that was finished we could then relax and I would be allowed to speak!

As I look back on dozens of interviews, I realize that no matter if Ghelderode were delivering one of his long *discours*—I was his contented victim often—or talking more informally, he spoke in the most dramatically poetic language, rich in images. He was a true storyteller. When I questioned him about this lost art, he replied, "My taste for stories, particularly fantastic ones, I owe to my mother. She was in tune with many mysteries, loved proverbs, had a large repertory of folk tales and forgotten songs. She is responsible for the troubadour and the actor in me. If I am Don Quixote, I owe her that gift."

After I told Ghelderode why some of us Americans preferred his work (it was not as frightening or as bitter as that of Beckett or Genet writing in the "absurd" style, but more fanciful, lyric and poetic), he began to talk at length about his plays. "I am a lone spirit," he said quietly, "listening to my inner voices; yes, a poet like my *Pantagleize* who unknowingly started a revolution because he thought life beautiful and exclaimed to all 'What a lovely day!' "

Ghelderode first started writing plays for himself which he hid away and showed no one. He wrote them because of his own inner need, his anguish or *angoisse,* a word he often employed. Years later, after dozens of plays had been piled in the cupboard, friends discovered them and had them performed in the small Brussels theaters. It was a young Belgian who first took Ghelderode's plays to Paris where during the forties some dozen or so were first seen. "I am proud," Ghelderode announced, "that not once in forty-five years did I ever ask anyone to put on or to publish my plays. Not once!" Perhaps that in part explains why Ghelderode's reputation was so long in growing.

GHELDERODE wrote plays, short stories, poetry, and miscellaneous prose. If one counts his letters (some critics believe they are his finest contribution) which must number in the thousands—this writer has received over one hundred and fifty separate mailings in two and a half years—then a careful estimate would be that Ghelderode's complete work would fill thirty or so volumes. Not inconsiderable for a dreamer, as he called himself!

Most of Ghelderode's writing could be characterized as among the most religious of any ever recorded; I mean by that Catholic, Christian, mystical—religious in the sense that his whole being was centered in God and His supernatural forces, in the mysteries of life and death, in daily existence with God as life's forceful center, as life's purpose.

I do not own a Ghelderode letter in which he does not mention both death and God. They were synonymous to him. He called death the most beautiful thing life can offer, referring to it as "his faithful friend," "red roses in the snow," "innocent violets in the eyes of Christ," "blue sunlight," as fulfillment, peace, destiny . . . as life itself.

As for God, Ghelderode lived close to Him and according to the Church calendar. In every correspondence there was always a reference to the appropriate season, whether Lent or Advent or Christmastime or to the days following Pentecost. His life centered around Christ as if he were a monk in the middle ages.

The last letter Ghelderode penned was to his American friend Renée Fox, his brown-haired heroine whom he called "skinny angel": he wrote to her on March 3 concerning the days of Lent, a fitting epitaph:

"Hopes come to life again. The sun rises higher each day. Our days grow better. Yes . . . now come the

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violet days of Church liturgy, the desolation of the empty tabernacle. God absent. The churches are strange these holy days. Holy Thursday. Good Friday. Then the Paschal Explosion, the carillons of Flanders, the bells that cry out: Hallelujah! He is risen! Nature also! . . . And soon the harvesters of Breughel will arrive with flasks on their hips." SAMUEL DRAPER

(Samuel Draper is the founder and president of the American Friends of Michel de Ghelderode and is working on a biography of the Belgian playwright.)

David Littlejohn

Fitzgerald's Grand Illusion

"He recorded the age he was helping to form and his work and his play became hopelessly intertwined"

FEW WRITERS' lives are so well worth the telling as F. Scott Fitzgerald's. His own story, his and Zelda's, has all the brilliance and glamour, all the pathos and symbolic force of the best of his fiction. His fiction, in fact, *is* his life, but life with the edges trimmed, given point and precision, a precious concision, a sense of ordered direction that his real life never had. The backgrounds of his novels—Princeton, New York, Long Island, Paris and the Riviera, Hollywood—were the settings he himself had danced and died through; each of his heroes in turn is another, deeper view of the author.

Half of the pleasure of a good biography, in fact—and the latest is a good one—is the shock of recognizing events and characters out of the novels. Everything that ever happened to Fitzgerald, and this was a man to whom things happened, wild, incredible things, seems to be happening again somewhere in the novels and stories.

This alone might make a biography richly entertaining. But Andrew Turnbull's *Scott Fitzgerald (Scribner's. $5.95.)* is vastly more than that, as Scott Fitzgerald was vastly more than a writer. He invented in his fiction the metaphor of the 1920's, and then led the dance himself. He and Zelda, his mercurial, magical bride—"so obviously, romantic lovers," wrote Van Wyck Brooks—waltzed drunkenly around a world the color of his dreams and the size of millions, "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz" come true. "He recorded the age he was helping to form," writes Turnbull, "and his work and his play became hopelessly intertwined." He recreated, as someone seems to do every generation, the American Romantic Ideal—"the ever-witty, the ever-beautiful"; and, of course, above all else, the unthinkably, gloriously rich.

The ideal went out of fashion, though, in 1929, and so did he; the age he invented had died. "It was now fashionable to consider him passé, buried with the foolishness of the twenties." "But to die," Fitzgerald once mourned (a few months before he did in fact), "so completely and unjustly after having given so much." Trying desperately to live, or live down, their Grand Illusion, Zelda went hopelesly insane, and Fitzgerald died a forgotten, alcoholic, Hollywood hack.

The Grand Illusion survived, however, and men have come to agree that Gatsby and Gatsby's parties represented something far more essential than the twenties. The shift of attention and acclaim to the richer, if less meticulously carved *Tender is the Night*—Fitzgerald's, not Jason Robard Jr.'s and Jennifer Jones'—suggests, moreover, that his highest achievement was not the nostalgic evocation of an age. It was not even the recreation of an essential American myth: the green light Gatsby believed in at the end of Daisy's dock; not even in the exquisite and affecting prose he found to communicate the dream—at its best, the finest that American fiction can offer. Fitzgerald's genius, an almost tragic genius, as *Tender is the Night* gives witness, was fully to understand the hopelessness, even the appalling viciousness of the romantic ideal he created. In a way not unlike far greater artists, he could both wholly believe in the ideal—in Gatsby, Gatsby's green light, the drunken butterfly world of the twenties, the whole grand American dream—and consciously recognize its ugliness and folly.

Perhaps oversimplifying, we like to apportion our novelists into "romantic" and "realistic" realms: on the right we place the suprasocial, unrealistic visionaries, on the left the involved and conscientious critics. The

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now famous "Crack-Up" may have been the result, but Fitzgerald, alone among the great American novelists, seems to have been able to live, totally and effectively, in both worlds; "to hold," as he put it, "two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function"—to have been able both to dream and to criticize his dreaming.

ANDREW TURNBULL is not the first to realize the extraordinary potential for drama in the life story of Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald himself discovered it first. Budd Schulberg, who worked with the aging Fitzgerald on a movie assignment the year before he died, turned this grotesque experience into *The Disenchanted.* Sheila Graham, his friend of the Hollywood years, paid her respects in *Beloved Infidel,* a notebook for the notebooks of *The Last Tycoon.* Most interesting, though, is a comparison with *The Far Side of Paradise,* Arthur Mizener's prize-winning, "pioneering" biography of 1951, surely a key document in the "Fitzgerald Revival."

For one thing, of course, Turnbull knows more. He has interviewed a selected four hundred and fifty people ("and corresponded with several hundred more"). He can dare, now, to name Miss Graham outright as Fitzgerald's mistress, and get straight the name of Zelda's French airman. He revises, even dismisses, not a few of the classic Fitzgerald anecdotes "on the basis of new information," and adds a fair handful of his own. But more to the point, he has simply written a far better book.

Turnbull has caught, one feels, the very curve and contour of his subject's life; he seems painstakingly to have traced a "significant form" in this shapeless mountain of detail. His book "reads like a novel" in the very best sense. It has, over-all, the inexorable "rightness," the necessity of sequence and structure and thoughtfully chosen incident that makes the experience of it a pleasure, and the final effect one of unity and a meaningful coherence. He has communicated the totality of the man—only Fitzgerald's collected works could do it better—and has done it (for this one is grateful) in scarcely over three hundred pages.

Mizener's work, on the other hand, seemed to have no underlying pattern, no developing form, no standard of choice: it is to Turnbull's in this respect, as the novel whose name it paraphrases is to *Tender is the Night.* Attempting a "critical biography"—something of a bastard genre to begin with—Mizener was forced to break into the already uneven pace of his narration with extended (though often valuable) critiques of each of the novels in turn. Digression, in fact, digression on vast and vague questions of the man and his work, was the rule rather than the exception in this earlier work, and the subject was often all but lost in the rambling and indiscriminate prose.

Mizener's book is unquestionably the better documented, the more "scholarly," if you will—though this is somewhat to impugn good scholarship. But Turnbull's (while depending, as he confesses, a good deal on his predecessor's) brings us the man. If much of Fitzgerald's life has in fact the quality, as it shares the content, of the best of his fiction, Turnbull maximizes the effect by his own thoughtful and judicious presentation. Fitzgerald, whose comments on the craft of fiction are among the most valuable quotations in the book, might almost have been speaking of his biographer when he insisted on "the enormous moral business that goes on in the mind of anyone who writes anything worth writing . . . the mental speed that enables you to keep the whole pattern in your head and ruthlessly sacrifice the side shows."

THERE ARE lapses, of course, and they hurt. The single chapter of "memoir" (Turnbull, as a boy of eleven, knew Fitzgerald as a tenant of his parents' Maryland estate) is over-detailed far beyond its significance. The author's analysis of Fitzgerald's Catholicism —even worse, of his "Irishness"—is weak and unconvincing. Ideally, he might have woven in more effectively biographical passages from the novels and stories. "Babylon Revisited," one feels, tells us more about the man and his time than twice its length of "real-life" anecdote, however carefully researched. Even more embarrassing are Turnbull's occasional attempts at a "poetic" style.

But by and large the man is thoroughly in control of his weapons, and his weapons are those of the craftsman of fiction. He sets his scene with admirable, and economic, effect: the Princeton of 1916, New York in 1920, that dazzling crowd at Antibes. He brings characters to life with just the right touches; Zelda, that most elusive of beings, is before us in a paragraph, whirling mindlessly around a deserted Casino floor. Never, to my knowledge, has such full justice been done to the massive, Johnsonian "father-figure" of American letters, Edmund Wilson—the man Fitzgerald called "my intellectual conscience" for twenty years. So for Monsignor Fay, John Peale Bishop, Christian Gauss (all characters in *This Side of Paradise*), Maxwell Perkins, Ernest Hemingway, the rich Riviera Murphys, Irving Thalberg ("The Last Tycoon"), Sheila Graham, the whole *dramatis personae:* they are there.

Most importantly, of course, so is F. Scott Fitzgerald. When all is added up and analyzed, the real reason his story seems "so well worth the telling" is that it is our story too, the American ideal, even to the tragic ending: the life we would all somehow like to have lived. "I remember," he wrote—*we* remember—"riding in a taxi one afternoon between very tall buildings under a mauve and rosy sky; I began to bawl because I had everything I wanted and knew I would never be so happy again."

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RICHARD M. OHMANN

Apostle of Uncertainty

Lagerkvist has described himself as a "religious atheist"

IT IS OVER forty years now since the appearance of Pär Lagerkvist's first piece of extended fiction, *The Eternal Smile.* In that tale the dead sit talking desultorily of their lives and their sufferings, until, stirred by one of their number to hatred of "life's insult to man," they decide to seek out God, to "call him to account for everything." After wandering for thousands of years through desolation and darkness, they come on God, a tired old man sawing wood, who answers their outraged "Why?" by quietly repeating "I have done the best I could."

Their anguish erupts: "But what did you mean by it all then? You must have meant something. What did you intend by this that you set going, by all this unimaginable life? We must demand a complete understanding of everything, and also the confusion which is in everything . . . We must demand coherence in everything, peace for our thought, for our tormented struggling heart, and also we must demand that there shall be no coherence, no rest, no peace. We must demand everything."

In humility, God replies, "I am a simple man. I have worked untiringly. I have stood by my work day after day for as long as I know. I have demanded nothing. Neither joy nor sorrow, neither faith nor doubt, nothing. I only intended that you need never be content with nothing." Somehow this dark riddle soothes the millions; they trek back to where they came from, content with a quotidian "life" which is "the one thing conceivable among all that is inconceivable."

If a writer *begins* with the stark metaphysical encounter with God and nothingness, where does he end after forty years and eight novellas (his plays and verse are not my concern here)? Lagerkvist's new book, *The Death of Ahasuerus (Random House. $3.75.),* published in Sweden in 1960, leaves us in pretty much the same place, or rather the same no place. God's name is spelled with a small letter now, and he never appears in person; he dropped from sight after *The Eternal Smile,* as Lagerkvist moved still farther away from religious certainty. But the central pattern is still the same: an endless quest for meaning, represented by a physical journey; confrontation with suffering; a defiant approach to God; a paradoxical revelation of God's finiteness; and a final reconciliation to death, which is at the same time a reconciliation to life.

AHASUERUS, the Wandering Jew, is of course the archetypal wayfarer, and as such, a natural symbol for Lagerkvist, who used him before in *The Sibyl.* Now we meet him near the end of life, with centuries of drifting behind him, at an inn for pilgrims to the Holy Land. His eyes are desolate; he stares into darkness. For all his experience he has learned nothing, except that he is incomprehensibly and endlessly persecuted by God. He falls in with one of the pilgrims, a hardened ex-soldier named Tobias, who never kneels, except once, involuntarily, in the presence of a dead woman who bears the stigmata. Under the strange compulsion of this vision Tobias is making a pilgrimage he does not understand; he too, as Ahasuerus would have it, is *chosen* by God: in God's power. With him is a woman, once a virgin huntress, whom he raped and turned into a harlot.

This nondescript party of outcasts lags behind the rest of the pilgrims and is further delayed by a mountain snowstorm. A mysterious arrow, apparently aimed at Tobias, is intercepted by the woman, and she dies. The two men reach the port of embarkation just after the pilgrims have sailed. Tobias, wild with disappointment, gives all his money to three scoundrelly-looking men who claim they are sailing for the Holy Land in their battered yawl. He embarks on his dubious voyage, perhaps to be destroyed in a tempest, perhaps to be killed by the sailors, perhaps to arrive at his goal; we do not know which. Ahasuerus languishes and dies in a monastery at the port.

That's all that happens. As often in Lagerkvist's fiction, the burden rests not on narrative, but on spare, iconographic scenes (the shriveled woman with the stigmata, the arrow in the mountain pass), on the emotions of the characters and, preeminently, on metaphysical speculation. For Lagerkvist is a relentlessly philosophical writer, and his theme is always the same: man's suffering and its relation to a greater power than himself. The entire story of this book seems merely a scaffolding erected to hold the deathbed of Ahasuerus, and his final thrust at understanding. To what insight is he raised? That all mankind,

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not Christ alone, is crucified: "I understand this; I discovered it at last: man lies forsaken on his bed of torment in a desolate world, sacrificed and forsaken, stretched out upon a little straw, marked by the same wounds as yourself . . . though only you are called the Crucified."

Christ, who cursed the Wandering Jew, was actually his brother in pain. A crucifixion requires a crucifier, and that role Ahasuerus assigns to God: "He sacrifices men! He demands continual sacrifice—human sacrifice, crucifixions!" The hateful revelation is, paradoxically, a release for Ahasuerus, a release from the power of God. By his own strength he has "vanquished god"; the discovery of divine wickedness lifts the centuries-old curse of ignorance, solves the onerous riddle, and writes a coda to the endless wanderings. At last Ahasuerus can die.

But there is a final twist to the argument. Though the pilgrim's quest is futile, his intuition must be valid. "Beyond the gods, beyond all that falsifies and coarsens the world of holiness . . . there must be something stupendous which is inaccessible to us." It is that holy thing, hidden from men by God, which Ahasuerus embraces in dying, in passing into mystery. He dies happily in a miraculous burst of light, which he values no less for the knowledge that it is simple diurnal sunlight.

An imprecation that is a triumph and an affirmation, an understanding that is no understanding, a commonplace miracle: the paradoxes suit Lagerkvist's agnostic temperament, and they are strongly felt. But the reader may wonder if the strange affirmation which ends this book is adequately contained by the main action, whether the metaphysical position has in the story itself what T. S. Eliot calls an "objective correlative," a hard-won concreteness that stands for and evokes the abstract feeling or thought. And he may wonder, too, whether cosmic affirmation, even of this ambiguous cast, is a possible consequence of Lagerkvist's tormented search.

The two points are related. All his fiction is freighted with philosophy, but in the best of it narrative structure and scene finely support the burden. And in the best of his fiction that burden is overwhelmingly one of doubt and brooding evil, not of reassurance. Uncertainty and suffering are woven into the very fabric of experience as Lagerkvist most powerfully feels it; affirmation in his world is like a candle in the outer darkness.

IN THE autobiographical *Guest of Reality* (1925) the boy Anders is besieged by reminders of death. His family lives above a railway station restaurant, where the casual guests and the passing trains speak of transiency and impermanence. The beer garden, festive at night, is desolate and frightening during the day.

At play, Anders digs a hole in the sand, and a well-intentioned man tells him that when children dig holes someone in the house is going to die. The boy has a nightmare of the living and the dead, all in one huge grave, with a mighty but incomprehensible voice speaking overhead. In the yard is an ice house, cold and windowless, which terrifies Anders, but curiously attracts him too. He goes in, and stands shivering but immobilized by fear of death. A dismal old woodcutter, a thunderstorm, his grandfather's wrinkles, these too threaten the perilous security of family and home.

Yet around the humble labor of the father, the graceful domesticity of mother and sister, there is an aura of almost unbearable beauty (like that in *Our Town,* or Agee's *A Death in the Family)*—unbearable because so fragile. Anders prays in the woods: "let none of them die, for certain, not one. Let Father live, let Mother, let his brothers and sisters . . . Let not one possibly die. Let everything be as it was. Let nothing be changed!" But the equilibrium *is* shattered; his grandmother does die, and even before, while she wastes away, Anders thinks of her as dead. To live is to be dying; to be dying is to be dead; this is the one certainty.

After this tale Lagerkvist never again dwells so forcefully on the poignance of ordinary existence, but the certainty of death is with him for good—and the uncertainty of nearly everything else. For above all, Lagerkvist is the apostle of uncertainty and ignorance. A "religious atheist," he has called himself: one who is temperamentally religious, but who finds nothing to pin his faith on. That man should yearn for comprehension, yet be sunk in a world of suffering which is incomprehensible: that condition rankles as an outrage in the hearts of Pär Lagerkvist's compelling antiheroes.

The most twisted and malign of these, the title character in *The Dwarf* (1944), lives in an Italian Renaissance court that is bursting with new intellectual energy and the spirit of inquiry. But the dwarf despises it all: the astrologers' telescopic peerings and omen-seeking, the prince's architectural experiments, the priests' rituals, the philosophy and the "pokings and ferretings" of a da Vinci-like virtuoso—everything but the art of war, of killing.

To the dwarf it is all play, all pretending. "Only I *am*," he says. From the platform of his existential self-possession he looks down scornfully on philosophy as a childish toy. The prince and the virtuoso exult in the greatness of life; "How do they know?" asks the dwarf. "One might just as well affirm that it was small, insignificant, completely unimportant . . . ." Just as well, but no better. The error is not in the optimism, but in the impulse to draw *any* conclusion. For the dwarf, "life itself can have no meaning." Throughout

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his virulent narrative, declarations of ignorance echo like a chorus: "I understand nothing."

NOR IS the universe more comprehensible to the other heroes of Lagerkvist's best fiction, *The Hangman* (1933), *Barabbas* (1950), and *The Sibyl* (1956). The hangman confronts God with an indictment and a question, but for an answer there is only God's stony gaze and "the icy wind of eternity. . . . There was nothing to be done. No one to speak to. Nothing." Barabbas asks himself, at last, if there has been any meaning in his life, and can find none: "But this was something he knew nothing about." And the Sibyl, though she has been possessed a hundred times by the divine spirit, can only say "I know nothing."

In the chaos of life, God should be a pole of certainty, of order; thus the dead who seek God in *The Eternal Smile* are seeking "what is always true." But they find only the enigmatic old wood-cutter. Similar figures are the silent, stone-faced God whose stare mocks the hangman's query, and the silent, smiling, idiotic son whom the Sibyl has borne to God. When the Princess prays to Christ, in *The Dwarf*, "The Crucified One does not answer." And so on. Behind God's inscrutability is his multiformity, the very reverse of system and order. For the Sibyl, her god is "both evil and good, both light and darkness, both meaningless and full of a meaning which we can never perceive, yet never cease to puzzle over." This jumble of opposites she can neither hate nor love.

Others in Lagerkvist's books, however, are not content with a riddle, particularly one that implicates human beings in senseless pain. Hence Ahasuerus' conviction (in *The Sibyl*) that God is evil, heartless, malignant, and his final defiance of God in the new book. Hence the dwarf's nausea at talk of divine harmony. And hence Barabbas' hate for Christ, the sacrificer of men.

THESE FIGURES, along with the hangman, radiate an extraordinary malignance. They hate man, too, for his cruelty, for his arrogance, or for his ignorance. The Christian message, "love one another," falls with extreme oddity on their ears. Who can understand such words, within the human landscape of these books—the torture, thievery, rape, battle, and slavery that fill Lagerkvist's pages? And his heroes, through whose eyes and whose words we see the world (since Lagerkvist rarely intrudes an authorial point of view), have been especially ill-treated by it.

The dwarf, with his obscene deformity; the hangman, with his blood-red clothes and his symbolic responsibility for human cruelty; Barabbas, whose mother hated him at his birth, and who must move through incredible scenes of Roman inhumanity toward his eventual crucifixion, strangely drawn to those very Christians who most despise him; the Sibyl, wrenched from a simple life to be the uncomprehending mouthpiece of the god, who jealously kills her lover and impregnates her with an idiot son; Ahasuerus, alone denied the blessing of death, because of what seems to him a random and trivial act: all are outcasts, set off from other men, hated by them, persecuted by God, and deprived even of knowledge. Their lives are moved by forces they do not understand, or, worse, by no force at all, by chance (Barabbas lives, Christ dies: "it just turned out that way"; Barabbas' crucifixion, too, "just turned out like that"). Isolation and hate are the air they breathe.

In these, the strongest of Lagerkvist's tales, there are to be sure some traces of beauty, but a beauty that reaches us gravely qualified by the rancor or skepticism through which it sifts. There is the Sibyl's passionate love idyll—but we hear it from the lips of a ruined old woman who knows what a jealous god can do. There is the simple nobility of the early Christians—clouded over by the blank skepticism of Barabbas. And, most electrifying, there is the Romeo-and-Juliet sub-plot in *The Dwarf*—its pathos darkened by the narrator's grotesque misanthropy. The only nobility that survives, finally, is that of the tormented heroes themselves. It issues in uncertainty and rebellion, at best.

But uncertainty and rebellion are not dishonorable conditions. In any case, the world as Lagerkvist sees it offers no other terms: take it or leave it, take it or die. In his best work—and it ranks with the best in contemporary Europe—there is no compromise with them. Reassurance and peace, as in *The Death of Ahasuerus*, are not materials he is at home with.

Question in the Spring

Ambiguous spring impinges, bearing down,
Massive in beauty, upon the undefended mind:

Nights turn in slumber to a stir of little songs,
Caught in the winds that begin and die
Under spiced carnations;
Within a small and purple world
Beneath an iris-petal under a silvery rain of moon;
Above and around the mealy-sweet
Of pear-tree blossoms, naked-white.

And when the morning's rain
Crushes the rank and satiated flower-cluster to the grass,
The mind, out-generaled, calls a temporary peace,
A sly, beginning friendship in the tall tents of the foe,
Sensing accommodation and an answer, distant, sure,
Within the bitter whistle of November winds.

JOHN HAZARD WILDMAN

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HORACE GREGORY

A Bloomsbury Ancestor

Walpole was no less contradictory and complex than his century

IN RECENT years, Americans who have a taste for reading history frequently find their haven in the eighteenth century. A return to the eighteenth century absolves the American pilgrim of mere "escapism" into better times than ours; for, after all, it is common knowledge that this complex, active and thoroughly engaging century with its Age of Reason poised against its evangelical fervors contained the germs of what we now call "democratic idealism." Is it significant that the American publishers of J. H. Plumb's Life of Sir Robert Walpole hastened to advertise it as President Kennedy's choice for weekend reading? Is the President finding a parallel between Sir Robert's high-flying, prosperous Whiggery in George II's reign and his own Democratic Party today? The answer to both these question is: perhaps.

Studies of eighteenth century life and manners in the British Isles have been the object of highly successful academic research in the United States. To this end American wealth, learning, energy and technical skill have joined British scholarship, and the results have excited admiration on both sides of the Atlantic. One center of this activity is at Yale, which has been responsible for the publication of Boswell's *Journals.* To this it has added a long sustained project of re-editing the works of Horace (son of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert) Walpole. The facilities at Yale are also responsible for Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis's brilliant lectures (*Horace Walpole: The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts:* Bollingen Series. Pantheon. $6.50.)

Mr. Lewis' book demonstrates—among many other things—that if the author knows his subject thoroughly, the ugly jargon of research scholarship need not mar the page. Mr. Lewis talks so supremely well in print his book is a joy to read, and since he has collected Walpoliana for thirty-five years with the same devotion that Walpole collected Gothic relics at Strawberry Hill, one almost believes that he himself is Horace Walpole come back to life.

The purpose of Mr. Lewis's book is to sum up Walpole's accomplishments, and to shed further light over the complex details of his personality, for Walpole was no less contradictory and complex than the century through which he lived his eighty years. Mr. Lewis begins his commentary by dismissing the legend (reiterated several times during the nineteenth century, and offered as a plausibility by Mr. Plumb) of Horace Walpole's illegitimacy. It was supposed that since his mother was unhappily married to Sir Robert, her youngest son's father was the elder brother of Lord Hervey, the truth of which is disclaimed by Lord Hervey's *Memoirs* in a new edition (1952). On this refreshing note, Mr. Lewis opens the way to a revaluation of Walpole's character.

With some knowledge of Sir Robert's ability to make and force decisions, of his full, though cold-blooded action in political affairs, a new unsentimental look at Horace Walpole reinforces the conclusion that he was indeed Sir Robert's son. The son was no less ambitious than the father, no less successful in exerting his will and getting what he wanted out of living; the differences were that the son's ambitions were literary, and since he inherited a generous income from his father, he lacked Sir Robert's unscrupulous need to amass a huge fortune. Young Walpole's frail appearance was flagrantly deceptive. He was short, yet so slender, so well-poised as he entered a room on tip-toe that he seemed tall. The energy he displayed in his many writings as well as his executive skill in managing estates, his affairs at Strawberry Hill, his care of friends and relatives, matched his father's control of government. Like his father, he was never widely popular; his influence made itself felt by being imposed from the upper layers of influential circles.

WAS WALPOLE charming? He was disarming—but that is another quality. As he talked he wrote; and the sound of his voice is detached, as clear as an echo heard from the ceiling in the middle of a room. His style is light—a lightness not of weakness, but of strength—a fact that Sir Walter Scott observed in his admirable analysis of why Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* caught and held its readers. Sir Walter also remarked—which is as true today as then—that Walpole's gift of lightness in his prose is inimitable: it is his voice, firm in its decisions.

Not the least of the reasons why Walpole is remembered today is the legend of his friendship with Thomas Gray, which began in boyhood at Eton, suffered a famous break when the two young men travelled the Continent together to return home separately, and was re-

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sumed at Walpole's instigation four-and-a-half years later. Against the forces of Gray's strong-willed pride, Walpole, using his power to disarm opposition, became Gray's protector, and there can be little doubt that he hastened the fame of "The Elegy in a Country Church-Yard."

The strong friendship with Gray is a good proof of the tenacious character of Walpole's loyalties—and one might say, as one sees him extend the benefits of his protection to his elder brother's illegitimate children, to his unbrilliant cousin, Henry Seymour Conway, to the maiden ladies, the two Miss Berrys, that his most intimate friendships were almost patriarchal. Behind each, one feels that Walpole made the decision to be friendly; he made his choices, and therefore controlled the flow of his affections.

He extended the same measure of control over those who received the majority of his letters. Since we now know the letters were written for us to read rather than to those to whom they were addressed, Walpole's choices centered on those who were most likely to preserve them. These were not the cleverest people of his day, yet bright enough to appreciate his wit, well-placed enough to quote his best remarks—and in several cases so far removed from both London and Strawberry Hill that whatever Walpole wrote assured the reader of a vicarious authority in knowing what to think and how to move in fashionable society. These last included the Rev. William Mason, academic poetaster ("in Simplicity a Child" Gray wrote of him) at Cambridge, and Sir Horace Mann, who resided in Florence for over forty years.

WALPOLE'S firmly decided opinions were of no offense to those who received his longest letters, yet to us much of their brilliance shines not in their rightness, but in their reflection of what high Whig society accepted as fashionable belief. Walpole's convictions were set in motion by an almost patriotic duty to revive and preserve records of British antiquity. It was by this route he built his lath and plaster castle on Strawberry Hill as a museum of Gothic relics. In contrast to his neo-classical temper, this activity placed him well in the fore of what later came to be known as the Romantic Movement.

Moreover, even today one sees in Strawberry Hill a Rococo-Gothic ancestor of John Ruskin's recommendations for neo-Gothic designs at Oxford. At court, Whig preference for the Germanic House of Hanover ran parallel to ideas of Gothic revival. Walpole was not alone, nor was his *The Castle of Otranto* the only Gothic novel that caught the fancy of eighteenth century readers; it was immediately followed by others, and one should conclude that Walpole quickly grasped an important element in the contrasting complex of eighteenth century feeling. Below court circles with their gossip, Germanic Gothic behavior in fashionable asides, antiquarian interests spread from universities downward to James Macpherson's "Ossian" and Thomas Chatterton's "Rowley."

The "Rowley" incident in Walpole's life was one of the few misfortunes in his career. After Chatterton's suicide, Walpole's earlier refusal to be his patron placed Walpole on the defensive: the question of whether or not the "Rowley" papers were childish forgeries was beside the point; Chatterton had become an image (evoking tears) of starving, precocious genius, killed by neglect—and Walpole was the image of a self-indulgent man of wealth. Chatterton's boyishly impertinent letters written to Walpole concerning "Rowley" alerted Walpole's fears of ridicule; he was vain of his efforts at Strawberry Hill, and from the evidence of "Rowley's" writings Chatterton had sent him, Gray assured Walpole that their antiquity was false. So far, but no further, Walpole was in the right; his failure, greater than all his attempts at caution, was a failure to recognize the actual poetry in the forged manuscript under his eyes.

He capped this mistake by believing that Dr. Percy, editor of the *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* was the author of a "dull" "Rowley" ballad! Walpole's blindness in the "Rowley" incident carries us forward to the Bloomsbury blindness of Walpole's literary heirs in London, the Virginia Woolf circle as it existed between two world wars.

SINCE THE Walpole heritage in Bloomsbury was merely semi-political and literary—*not* literal—a parenthesis is in order. Walpole's Whiggery included: a lifelong defense of his father, an inactive seat in Parliament, tolerance toward Dissenters, John Wilkes, Americans in their War for Independence, a hatred of Tories, literary or otherwise, and a horror, clear-eyed and practical, of French revolutionists. What little evangelism he possessed was devoted to the collecting of Gothic relics at Strawberry Hill. He was not religious, yet remained within the Established Church of England, where with both wit and self-insight, he called himself "an infidel." He disliked the Scots. During the nineteenth century, literary Whiggery continued under the guiding hands of Macaulay and Trevelyan, and following its eighteenth-century line, its academic outpost remained at Cambridge. Not too slowly, Whiggery shaded into Liberalism, and as the twentieth century arrived to make itself heard, the silver brocaded cocked hat of Horace Walpole became silk-hatted Liberalism in Bloomsbury with leanings toward the Fabians, Woman Suffrage, and Labour; its Cambridge heritage was also retained—its essential speech had become high-pitched, less clear in its decisive notes than Walpole's, and combined the chiming voices of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf.

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One might, in fact, assert that Horace Walpole's excursions into antiquity were distant forerunners of Strachey's *Elizabeth and Essex*, that "The Castle of Otranto" was an early ancestor of Virginia Woolf's fanciful *Orlando*. As for extraordinary blindness, Mrs. Woolf was as blind to the writings of James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence as Walpole was to the writings of Samuel Johnson, Boswell and Chatterton. The Bloomsbury world of course had become much smaller than the world of men and women, history, gossip, and politics that Walpole knew.

In its day the opposing world to Walpole's was that of Boswell's and Johnson's. We now know that Johnson underrated Walpole's genius when he dismissed him as one who wrote of trifles, nor did Johnson anticipate the range and depth of influence that Gray's "Elegy" was to exert over poets of the future. Yet he was less harsh, less blind in his rejection of Walpole than Walpole was in voicing his dislike of him:

"Often, indeed, Johnson made the most brutal speeches to living persons; for though he was good-natured at bottom, he was very ill-natured at top. He loved to dispute to show his superiority . . . Johnson's blind Toryism and known brutality kept me aloof; nor did I ever exchange a syllable with him . . . After the Doctor's death, Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Boswell sent an ambling circular-letter to me, begging subscriptions for a Monument for him . . . I would not deign to write an answer; but sent down word by my footman, as I would have done to parish officers with a brief, that I would not subscribe."

Of Boswell's *Life* of Johnson, Walpole wrote: "If an elephant could write a book, perhaps one that had read a great deal would say that an Arabian horse is a very clumsy ungraceful animal." One becomes certain that Walpole's literary judgments were those of a man of fashion. His single contribution of enduring literary value in criticism was his championship of Gray's "Elegy"—and this because he felt Gray "loved" him—the loyalty of friendship made that choice secure.

With his *Letters* and *The Castle of Otranto*, his *Reminiscences* of the reigns of the first two Georges, written for the amusement of the two Miss Berrys, stands as a work of the first order. Only Swift's *Journal to Stella* may be compared to it, and Swift lacked the sharp-edged lightness of Walpole's prose. Walpole's view of the world about him remained precociously mature from childhood into old age; the clarity of his insight was never childlike. He was the unique, never flagging observer of human events and motives. Confident of success in the industrious career he had chosen for himself, he was untouched by bitterness. Neither forty years of suffering from gout, nor the distractions of constantly repairing and enlarging his house at Strawberry Hill, dimmed his faith that he was destined to win enduring favor with posterity.

THE STAGE

The Drawing Room and Beyond

"ROSMERSHOLM" is one of the subtlest, most intricate, and—although not necessarily for these reasons—most important of Ibsen's plays. In 1886 he was almost halfway through his last and major phase. Nine years before, "Pillars of Society" had broken with the intentions of the bourgeois stage; after "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts," his first, somewhat uncertain thrusts into the true unknown, he had worked off his disappointment and anger at their reaction in "An Enemy of the People" and had come into full possession of his total theme and identity with "The Wild Duck." "Rosmersholm" was a turning-point, and at the same time a summation and a source for what was to come.

In it Ibsen put the governing impulses of "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts" into a wider frame, freeing them from some of the specificity of idea and action—their problematic aspect—that had cramped them there. His dilemma had always been to find ways of anchoring his imagination; the bourgeois theater had no place for "Brand" or "Peer Gynt," so he accepted the burdens of naturalism, the box set and the events of the parlor, and made them serve the earlier visions, from which he never ceased to draw. The immense subjects with which his art was concerned—the past as hound of the present, the ideal as corrupter of the actual, with the human soul caught between in illusion and self-deception— would from "Rosmersholm" on unfold in the most precarious equilibrium between poetry and fact, myth and statement, symbol and prop.

That is what makes all of Ibsen's later work so difficult for us; we are forever falling into the naturalistic trap, on the one hand, and the symbolic one on the other. The plays before "Rosmersholm" are reduced to the social problems with which they ostensibly deal, the very last dramas are seen as "poetic fantasies," and are thought to be proofs of Ibsen's waning and self-indulgent powers, since they are obsessional and ritualistic, lacking the sociological fervor and polemical force which we have decided are Ibsen's suitable qualities, at the same time as we find them dated.

We are not at all sure about "Rosmersholm." There is its sense of fatality going beyond strict events, there are evident symbols and a feeling of indefiniteness, a shifting between the psychic and the moral and metaphysical, tremendous compression, allusiveness, a highly-wrought texture of reference and implication. It is a "hidden" play. And yet there are still "problems" and external issues, the action is essentially within the naturalistic framework, there are no scenes on the mountain-top or on high towers. So we play it uncertainly, having trouble with this tragedy in the drawing-

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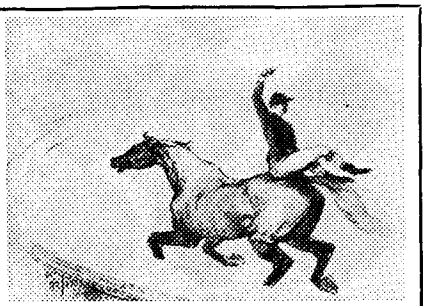

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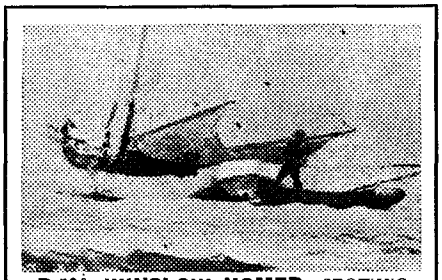

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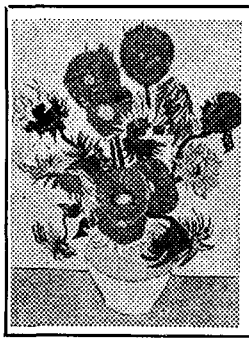

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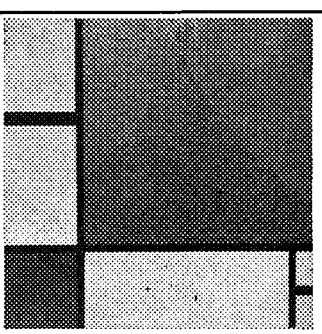

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room which resists familiar intonations and colloquial gestures but which is not a high tale about the death of kings either.

We are especially likely to get Rebecca West wrong. James Huneker's idea of her is the one we continue to hold, and it is a jaw of the naturalistic trap. She is, Huneker wrote, "as cunning as Becky Sharp, as amorous as Emma Bovary, as ambitious as Lady Macbeth. . ." The reviewers repeat this fractional truth and the academic surveys perpetuate it, along with their notions of Chekhov's "undramatic" drama and Shaw's ideational one. There are still such women around, one newspaper asserted last week in order to validate the play, the way novels are validated by our being assured of the possibility of meeting their characters in our streets.

The point about Rebecca is that you will not meet her in the street; she is not transferable from the play to reality; she is Ibsen's woman, not ours. If she is cunning, amorous and ambitious, the qualities serve another purpose than that of a courtesan or career woman, and they are in any case, partial and temporary, data for transformation, for dramatic development, and do not come close to defining her. She is in the play to be one element at the scene of a tremendous struggle from which moral revelation arises; and the "design" she carries out is not to trap a man but to snare a truth. The difference is that between Ibsen and the well-made play.

The truth of Rosmersholm comes out of the confrontation of entire realms of being and faculties, as all Ibsen's truths do. Rosmersholm, the place of inherited morality, of ideality and unchanging destiny, against the North, the open, the untrammeled. Rosmer himself, the man of received conscience, who suffers from a lack of effectiveness due to innocence and the ennervations of purity, Rosmer the *representative*, against Rebecca, the new, the unhistoric, the self-created, the *personal*. And the great central movement that constitutes the tragedy: the mutually mortal blows they deal in the attempt to fuse antitheses, to merge into a new being that shall be capable of transforming existence.

Of all the ways in which David Ross's current production fails, the one from which everything else comes is the inability to get past the drawing-room, the surface of the drama, to the tragic rhythm beneath. To do this you have to direct your actors in the job of playing together in a way that transcends the simple ensemble—which is necessary even on a naturalistic level—so that they may participate in a total movement and vision instead of in the stages of a narrative. You have to maintain the tension between detail and verisimilitude on the one hand, and the more spacious action, the metaphysical movement if you will, on the other. You have to subordinate your characterizations, the Huneker kind of thing, to the creation of a single organism.

But what happens is that Mr. Ross's cast doesn't even play well together in drawing-room fashion: there are scenes, especially some between Kroll and Rosmer, in which there is such declamation, so much sing-song alternation of speeches, that we wonder why there are no rostrums and individual water glasses. And there is a pervasive lack of larger implication, a steady dragging down of the play to the level of domestic tragedy, with the wider effects, the mystery and the fatality, being sought for in tightenings of the lips and sudden glances around, in over-rapid movements, and in the hoarse, passionate, neurotic interpretation of Rebecca by Nancy Wickwire.

Miss Wickwire is a good actress but she is a bad Rebecca because she plays her *à la* Huneker. "I don't think I can be said to be particularly high-strung," Rebecca tells Kroll at one point, and he agrees. It is a vital pointer to what she is: an *agent* of aspiration and destruction, whose relation to Rosmer simply uses the facts and emotions of their story to go beyond it. For example, their closing scenes, the developing *liebestodt*, have to be played with a sense that it summarizes a movement of the imagination and not merely an ill-fated romance, and with an ironic awareness of the limitations of the kind of language Ibsen had to use but which he was constantly pressing past.

But the last scenes of Mr. Ross's "Rosmersholm" feel like "Camille," and Miss Wickwire and Donald Woods embarrass us because of it. Mr. Woods had embarrassed us previously with his tight-lipped, inexpressive Rosmer; he fails because he doesn't do enough, as Miss Wickwire fails because she does too much. Only Bramwell Fletcher's Brendel is right; only in that small but essential role do we see the play triumphing over its difficulties and achieving its perilous equilibrium though being acted in a style that remains bound to events yet makes the signs accomplishing poetry. And Mr. Ross has chosen to make his highest percentage of cuts in just that place. *(At the Fourth Street.)*

RICHARD GILMAN

THE SCREEN

Gather Honey from the Weed

TO CONTINUE the family-life-in-the-movies-ain't-what-it-used-to-be cycle comes an English film that makes earlier items in the series, like "All Fall Down," "Five Finger Exercise," "Jules and Jim," and "A View from the Bridge," look like child's play. "A Taste of Honey" (Continental) tells the story of a seventeen-year-old girl, her breezy, irresponsible mother, her mother's vulgar boy friend who later becomes the girl's stepfather, the girl's carefree playmate—a Negro sailor

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who becomes her one-night-lover—and finally a homeless, homosexual young fellow who moves in with the stranded, pregnant girl and cares for her like a clucking mother hen.

This story isn't as unsavory as it may sound—in fact, it isn't a story at all; it's a mood piece, a slice of life, done with imaginative realism that neither condemns nor condones but presents this group of people as they are or could be in a grimy industrial town in the north of England. "A Taste of Honey" may shock some viewers with its frankness and vulgarity, but it has such warmth and humor amidst its grim and sad scenes that it becomes the most stirring film to turn up this year—or in a long, long time for that matter.

"A Taste of Honey" stems from the stage play by Shelagh Delaney, an interesting, off-beat *tour de force*. Producer-director Tony Richardson has expanded it into a lively, vital movie that is even better than the original. The script, written by Miss Delaney with Richardson, is a gem of movie-writing, and under Richardson's direction it is produced and played to perfection.

The key role, that of Jo, the fatherless daughter of a dissolute mother, was entrusted to newcomer Rita Tushingham. This young actress, appearing in her first movie, is absolutely right as the girl who longs for love and needs guidance but who meets life with bravery and humor in spite of all the raw deals she gets. In the cinema medium, it is often difficult to tell who should get major credit for a good performance—the actor, director, or even the photographer and film editor. Perhaps everyone connected with "A Taste of Honey" deserves some of the applause for Miss Tushingham's sensitive and knowing portrait of a lonely girl whose ability to bounce back after adversity is exceeded only by her haphazard and restless pursuit of happiness.

Under Richardson's thoughtful direction, the entire cast are excellent. Dora Bryan makes the mother a full-bodied woman of considerable animation but little discretion—the kind of a mother who has some affection for her daughter but not enough to let it curtail any of her own pleasures. Robert Stephens is offensively loud and common as the boy friend who marries mama and then gets into a bitter quarrel with Jo, who accompanies them as a member of the wedding to a cheap and cheesy Blackpool amusement park. Paul Danquah adds a lyrical note to the grim proceedings with his spontaneous performance as the Negro sailor who sympathetically befriends the hurt, unwanted Jo after Blackpool, spends the night with her, and sails off on a ship after a very touching parting at the dock next morning.

With mother away on her honeymoon, Jo is more lonely than ever. She quits school, gets a job, rents a barn-like studio apartment, and takes in a homosexual boy who has been thrown out of his rooming house. He becomes mother and father to her, watches over her during her pregnancy (no easy period for the girl who realizes her unwanted baby may be black), and even proposes marriage so that the baby will have a name. Seldom before have movies portrayed a homosexual with such biting realism. No other boys are involved, but Murray Melvin's portrayal in this difficult role, complete with mincing, fussy precision, and frustrating complications, captures this misfit completely. The portrait, for all its vividness, is not a caricature; his kindness to her and her appreciation are quite touching—and it turns out to be the one taste of happiness that both enjoy, until the mother's reappearance ends even that.

"A Taste of Honey" draws no moral, comes to no conclusion; but it is a penetrating, though not particularly uplifting study of human behavior. As a movie, it is extremely well made; and among its many assets are Walter Lassally's first-rate photography of the good cast and the drab industrial city, John Addison's fine musical score, and the skillful editing of Anthony Gibbs. It is a highly entertaining film and an achievement for Tony Richardson who has given us in this, the best of his films, a taste of cinematic excellence.

THE FAMILY in "Cape Fear" (Universal) is typical and ordinary enough, with lawyer Gregory Peck, wife Polly Bergen, and twelve-year-old daughter Lori Martin. It's what happens to them in this thriller that is so nerve-shattering. Their peace and calm and happy home life are suddenly turned into a reign of terror when ex-convict Robert Mitchum turns up in town to destroy Peck and his family. Some eight years ago, Peck witnessed Mitchum's vicious assault on a woman, and it was Peck's testimony that sent Mitchum to prison; now the vengeful Mitchum is intent upon getting even with him.

As a horror picture, "Cape Fear" is much too horrible; while director J. Lee Thompson succeeds in building up tremendous suspense, the whole affair becomes more a frightful exercise about a sex criminal pursuing his victims than a realistic excursion into revenge. It is hard to believe that police chief Martin Balsam can do nothing about restraining an ex-convict from further crime until this known degenerate actually commits another offense.

Through various threats and other acts difficult to prove, Mitchum goads Peck into hiring goons to beat up the evil ex-con. Then Mitchum's lawyer tries to get Peck disbarred. This aspect of the frustrating plot is dropped when Peck later traps Mitchum in a series of sex-and-violence scenes that are almost unbearable to watch. The acting is good, and Sy Bartlett's production is well done. The question is: was it worth doing?

PHILIP T. HARTUNG

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OF NOTE

An Ecumenical Decline?

FROM THE very first announcement, Orthodox and Protestants have looked with great interest on the forthcoming Second Vatican Council. After some early enthusiasm, however, most ecumenicists have taken a more cautious view of the results that may be expected from the Council. In a recent talk given at the Jesuit Seminary in Toronto, Canada, Father Gregory Baum, O.S.A., discussed some of the misgivings now felt by non-Catholics. The text of Fr. Baum's talk, reprinted here from the weekly *The Catholic Messenger* (407 Brady St., Davenport, Iowa, $5.), follows:

In the year after the convocation of the ecumenical council by Pope John in 1959, the ecumenical climate surrounding the Catholic Church reached a level of unprecedented friendliness. The Pope had declared that the purpose of the council was the reunion of Christians. It was explained immediately, it is true, that the council would be an affair of the Catholic Church alone, but the aim of the endeavor to renew and adapt Catholic life to the needs of the modern world was to prepare the way for Christian unity.

The response of Orthodox and Protestant Christians was, on the whole, very favorable. The ecumenical attitude of Leo XIII towards the Orthodox had finally borne fruit; and the friendly approach toward Protestants of Pius XII and the generosity of certain ecclesiastical documents published during his pontificate had been led to an unexpected fulfillment. Following the example of his great predecessors, Pope John expressed his sympathy and understanding for the Christians separated from the Church. Without expecting startling changes or complete reversal of policies, the Christian world looked forward to the council as the starting point for a more intensive ecumenical movement within the Church and better ecumenical relations with other Christian communions.

Orthodox and Protestants were hoping that the Catholic Church would remove from her life those obstacles to Christian unity which were not considered part of her essential structure. In a multitude of articles and books, published mainly on the continent of Europe, these Christians expressed their concern and expectations, and many of their suggestions were full of wisdom.

However, if we observe the ecumenical climate surrounding the Catholic Church in Europe in the spring of 1962, we notice that a certain decline has set in. New tensions have arisen. The attitude of separated Christians, Orthodox and Protestant, has become more reserved, more critical, and a little disappointed. Several pronouncements which have recently come from the Vatican have hurt, or frightened, separated Christians.

The papal encyclical on Leo the Great, *Aeterna Dei Sapientia,* issued on November 11 of last year, has provoked a rather negative reaction among the Orthodox. It was felt that the ecumenical tone which Leo XIII had begun and which the Popes had continued since his days had been abandoned. The new encyclical presents Catholic doctrine clearly and sharply, without giving the nuances significant in the dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox. The new document asserts the papal claims without simultaneously conceding the traditional place to the Orthodox hierarchy, and more especially the second place to the Patriarch of Constantinople, in the Church universal reconciling East and West.

The Orthodox Bishop Emilianos, at present at Geneva, has expressed his regrets and disappointment in several articles dealing with the new encyclical. Dr. Visser't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, has declared, in a public meeting in Paris, that the encyclical speaks of the Orthodox in terms which are not in keeping with the new ecumenical climate.

A second instance which has disturbed Orthodox and Protestant Christians in Europe was the reception the Vatican accorded to Father Lombardi's book on the ecumenical council. As is well known from the Catholic press, Father Lombardi's book deals with the charity and spiritual perfection which must pervade the mystical body of Christ on this earth. Towards the end of the volume, in a section dealing with practical applications, the author suggests certain adaptations and reforms of the Roman Curia. The book, published with the permission of the author's religious superiors at Rome, was criticized quite harshly, and apparently with authority, in *L'Osservatore Romano,* and the impression was created in this Vatican paper that the organization of the Roman Curia was not a matter for free discussion in the Church.

For the sake of clarity it must be mentioned here that the organization of the Roman Curia does not belong to the divine structure of the Catholic Church. Christ founded his Church upon Peter and the Twelve; and today it is their successors, the pope and the totality of bishops, who are the divinely established hierarchy governing the faithful. The Roman Curia is the administrative body, made up of cardinals, bishops, and other high ecclesiastics permanently established at Rome, through whom the pope exercises his supreme government in the Church. The Roman Curia has been reorganized many times in the history of the Church.

The affair of Father Lombardi, though perhaps of slight significance, has provoked rather unfortunate reactions among Protestants. Certain Protestant writers

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had, from the beginning, assumed a hesitant and incredulous attitude towards the coming council. They had claimed that papal power had reached such proportions in the Catholic Church of today that free discussion and significant organizational changes would no longer be tolerated.

Professor Benz, a well-known German scholar, had deemed it necessary to prophesy, rather unkindly, that the forthcoming council would resemble a *Reichstag* in a one-party state under a totalitarian head. Many Protestants have had the fear, not always expressed, that the Second Vatican Council will not enjoy the freedom of past councils but that the pope, or the influential men of the Curia, will impose their will upon the assembled bishops. The affair of Father Lombardi has appeared to many Protestants as a sign that the Roman Curia seeks to silence discussion before the council begins.

The third event which has created the low in the ecumenical climate of Europe was the recent apostolic constitution *Veterum Sapientia,* on the use of Latin in seminaries. Protestant observers familiar with papal documents of the last two generations find in this document a mode of expression which is unprecedented in this century.

The style, they say, is quite unlike the tone of Pope John's pronouncements of the past. They find the doctrine of the document difficult to reconcile with the claims made by recent popes in their mission encyclicals, the claim namely that the Catholic Church is not basically wedded to Western civilization. They are frightened by the sentence in the document forbidding Catholics to write against the use of Latin in seminary teaching. Some Protestant observers believe that this document is a means of intimidating the bishops in the Church and silencing free discussion before the council begins.

What is the Catholic reply to these interpretations? While we admit that in the long history of the Catholic Church, the Roman Curia, fearing loss of power, has often worked against ecumenical councils, we do not believe that this is true in the year 1962. The final answer to these interpretations can only be given by the council itself. The freedom of discussion at the council will demonstrate that bishops are still conscious of their divinely-given power to rule and to teach, and the willingness of the Catholic hierarchy to express their friendship and understanding to all men of good will, will demonstrate that the fears of Protestants and Orthodox were really unfounded.

BOOKS

Virtues and Vices in the Southern Literary Renascence

A Dream of Mansions. By Norris Lloyd. Random House. $3.95.
The Wandering of Desire. By Marion Montgomery. Harper. $4.95.
Judgment Day. By Thomas Chastain. Doubleday. $3.95.

by Walker Percy

THE VIRTUES of the Southern renascence provides clues to its faults. If Southern writers are blessed with a kind of historical perspective, as Louis Rubin called it, and a sense of place, as Robert Daniel called it, they are also more likely to fall prey to genre and mannerism. It may be true that one needs the past to understand the present, but one can also be trapped by it, like Mark Twain's river boat which got locked up forever in a bayou when the river changed course.

A sense of place can decay to the merely bizarre. A sense of person can be pushed to caricature and a whole region populated with eccentrics. An ear for language is ever in danger of being beguiled by the names of trains and states—O Lackawanna, O Alabama, O ye wide Missouri—or of doing duty as the back-porch virtuosity of Jeeter Lester.

But faults or no, a great deal of very good writing is being done in the South, and much of it by young women. Anyone speculating about Southern writing today had better know something about Southern girls—and small towns in the Deep South. For that is who is doing it and that is where it is coming from: there are at least a dozen women writers of the front rank from Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. A third ingredient is almost as common: expatriation. Take a girl with a good ear and a certain quality of consciousness, let her grow up in Valdosta as a tom-boy McCullers Mick, roaming the back lots and looking in at the Greek's of a night, sitting in the kitchen listening to the Negroes; remove her to Shaker Heights, give her time, and the brew begins to ferment.

The consciousness requires a presence in order that a literature be conceived between them—and presence there is, or was. "A memory of unheard voices," Wolfe called it, " . . . of the dark ruined Helen in the blood." The presence may be argued against, assigned to myth, sociologized, but presence nevertheless it is. Which is to say only that, for better or worse, it is a far different thing to grow up in Albany, Georgia, than in New Concord, Ohio, even though both may be heavily Presbyterian. Given sufficient talent of course, a powerful enough antenna, signals can be fetched out of nowhere. John Updike has dredged up a pirate's horde of evocative symbols from, of all places, Shillington in East Pennsylvania. But a place like Monroeville, Alabama, is itself so haunted by presences that

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the unheard voices make themselves heard by any sensitive ear.

The vein shows signs of playing out, however. One sign is that current evocations are at least once removed. They are no longer a hearkening back to the Time, the great days and the great men, but only to a time when the Time was remembered. It is just as well that it does play out. For only then can Southerners, armed with their peculiar weapons, attack the present. The promise of the renascence will only be fulfilled if the sense of the past can be effectively brought to bear on the dislocations of the present. Faulkner brought accounts almost up to date, but it is not enough to decry the "handkerchief-size lawns." Quentin Compson III collapsed under the ancient and honorable burden of the proto-Dorian South and killed himself at Harvard in 1910. But after all it is Quentin's sons and grandsons who are alive now. The great virtue of one Southern writer, William Styron, is that this is what he is writing about: not the burden of the past, not the collapse of those who came directly after, but of those who came after *them*. Styron writes of the suicide of Quentin Compson IV. And here he rejoins Updike.

Of the three listed Southern novels, two are very good ones. Norris Lloyd's, like Harper Lee's, is a once-removed evocation—and quite as stunning in the delicacy of its fabric and the accuracy of its scuppernong smells. As was done in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a Deep South village is evoked in *A Dream of Mansions* from a not-at-all-distant past, no more than a pre-television past, summoned up by a consciousness transplanted to the magic perspective of a Northern suburb. Miss Lloyd's epigraph, Roethke's " . . . a longing for another place and time, another condition," applies ambiguously, to the longing of little Hallie Jones for her white-columned mansion, but also to the longing now for the time of such longing.

The Wandering of Desire is Georgian too, and at least as good but different as can be, as different precisely as man from woman. It is a chronicle, a country epic, a first novel sprung forth whole and entire with full Faulknerian panoply of legends, yarns, family tales, and a command of country epithet unsurpassed since *The Hamlet*. Yet it is not derivative, owing no more to Faulkner than to Mark Twain and Ecclesiastes the Preacher. Listen to how Wash Mullis voted his mule:

"But before all that, Wash brought the niggers in to vote, and Scrub Fincher says there was a close race one time and he even brought Uncle Buck (the mule) in. Says that one of these fellows that was about to get a fire built under Old Man Meeks for good and certain was standing there challenging ever nigger that stepped up to vote, though there wasn't a thing he could do when he had done that. Anyway, it come Uncle Buck's turn. Wash had taken the saddle off him and the bridle and Uncle Buck come up and set down on his haunches like a jackass in front of the table and this fellow felt like a fool, but he says to Uncle Buck, 'Are you a bona fide resident of Ralston?' And Wash nudged Uncle Buck and Uncle Buck said, 'Yassuh.' I don't know for certain whether Uncle Buck got a drink of liquor after that or not, because Scrub Fincher says he will go so far in telling a tale, but if it comes to lying, he'll be damned if he will."

Every Southern writer must come to some kind of terms with the Negro. He can no more avoid it than a Negro writer can avoid writing about the white man. Sometimes the coming to terms, for or against, wrenches the novel out of place. In *A Dream of Mansions* and *The Wandering of Desire* the coming to terms does not get the better of the novel. In Chastain's it does. *Judgment Day* shows how a man's heart can be in the right place and how little this helps his writing. Hurts in fact. Once one sets out with a self-conscious, standard Harry Golden liberal view of race relations, it takes a considerable talent to get the brew to cook. What it comes to is shutting up the preacher. Any novel beginning with a lynching sets heavy odds against itself. The reader can hardly fail to be dismayed: either this fellow is very good indeed, one thinks, or what is more likely, he is going to come out against lynching. Or as they say on dust jackets, he is going to make "an impassioned plea for tolerance and understanding." Yet at that, *Judgment Day* is not as bad as the run-of-the-mill tolerance-and-understanding novel about the black folks moving next door to the white folks. Chastain is not altogether defeated by his good intentions. The Negro preacher's patient attempts to get his church fixed finally become a good story.

But Chastain's third paragraph is this: "On the ground wispy patches of withered grass grew, like diseased hair, out of the dry, cracked skin of the earth."

Norris Lloyd would know better. And Marion Montgomery's niggers are a lot better than Chastain's Negroes.

On Christian Art

Liturgy and Architecture. By Peter Hammond. Columbia University Press. $6.
Christianity in Modern Art. By Frank and Dorothy Getlein. Bruce. $5.

by James R. Mellow

THAT THE Liturgical Movement is the strongest contributing force for any hoped-for renaissance in Christian art and architecture is amply demonstrated by these two books: one a study of modern church building, the other a rapid history of modern art and architecture that attempts to rouse interest in the "possibility" of a contemporary Christian art by breathing life into a barely existing tradition.

Mr. Hammond is an Anglican clergyman. His book is the sturdy English work, dry and sensible in tone. It surveys the field of recent church building in England and on the Continent with brief excursions to America, and is primarily an exhortation to his lagging English brethren to take on the challenge of the Liturgical Movement and to stop raising up, in the name of God, phony cathedrals and fake-modern churches. These special intentions of the author, however, do not limit the breadth of his arguments and I think we can all learn something

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from him about our own medieval ideas concerning the physical structure of the church itself.

The most valuable and more interesting sections of Mr. Hammond's book are a call for reordering church architecture along liturgical lines, building from the altar outward—that is, making the single altar the focus of the architectural space and moving it towards the congregation and away from the east wall of the church, where it has been placed since the late Middle Ages. Our inability to think of the church as anything but a cathedral, of course, stands in the way of once more stressing, architecturally, the closeness of the clergy and the laity in the celebration of the Mass. While the cliché about the Middle Ages as an age of happy faith and good works goes on unabated and unexamined, it is instructive to learn that, architecturally speaking, clergy and laity were becoming more distinctly separated, with the layman taking on the role of a passive spectator rather than a participant. Our out-moded architectural ideas, strengthened by the Victorian Gothic Revival, still promote this state of affairs.

That there are voices crying in the wilderness—some of them American—is hopeful. Mr. Hammond draws some of his support from more contemporary-minded American clergymen. He quotes the *Diocesan Building Directives* of the diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, which states that "the design of the church begins with the altar." Another of his sources is an article by Bishop Dwyer of Reno, Nevada, (*Liturgical Arts*, Nov. 1958) which argues "that the cathedral symbol which has dominated our thinking and imagination for so long, and has dictated the forms and concepts of our building and decoration from actual cathedrals to country parish churches, is dead and had better be buried. The sooner we get it out of our system the better it will be for the ultimate development of living art and architecture in the service of religion."

While there is some hope in architecture, there seems little in art. The Getleins, though they throw their net quite wide, come up with only one artist who combines a high order of art with what one may feel is a deep sense of religious conviction in his theme—and that is Rouault. Others, like Nolde or Henry Moore or Dali, who have used Christian themes at various moments in their careers, are not altogether convincing examples of a continuing religious tradition. Poussin, after all, dipped into Greek and Roman mythology for his personae, without, necessarily, being a pagan. The lesser examples—an abstract sculpture by Barbara Hepworth and one by Theodore Roszak—speak only too well of the extremes to which a critic is reduced in his search for a meaningful Christian tradition in the midst of contemporary art.

Admittedly, the Christian content of any painting or sculpture is hard to define, and the degree of an artist's religious belief even more difficult to apprehend. I find myself wondering how much of our sense of religious feeling in the face of a particular work from the Middle Ages is predicated upon our beliefs and misconceptions about the period itself. In fairness, the Getleins face this problem with respect to contemporary art and conclude that it is only in architecture that there are signs of vital life. It is with some relief, one feels, that they turn their attention to La Purissima Church in Mexico and the recently dedicated church by Marcel Breuer for the Benedictine monks of St. John's Abbey in Minnesota.

Novels as Tracts

The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel. By Margaret M. Maison. Sheed & Ward. $4.50.

by Vivian Mercier

IT'S A LOT less exciting being an Anglican these days than it was a century ago: such was my first reflection after reading the opening chapters of Dr. Maison's fascinating book. In those days the Church of England and her sister Anglican churches were sharply divided into three parties: High, Low and Broad Church. Not only did each produce its own pamphlets, often directed against its rivals, but each harvested its own crop of religious novels—themselves frequently little better than pamphlets—which stressed the party's virtues and/or attacked its neighbors' vices. So copious and pleasurable was the effusion of ink that at least one High Church spinster novelist, Miss Charlotte Yonge, for many years felt it her duty to give up writing fiction during Lent.

The first impulse toward this great literary outpouring, which was to make the religious novel intellectually significant in England, came from the Oxford Movement. The Romantic epoch in literature and art had helped remind the Anglican Church of her Catholic heritage; a growing body of the Church of England clergy then began to revive practices and doctrines which extreme Protestantism had abandoned. Inevitably, a number of men found no logical halting-place on the journey until it brought them to the boundaries of the Catholic Church.

The first trend in Church of England novels during Victoria's reign was toward propaganda for the new High Church principles; then, after 1845, the date of Newman's departure from the Anglican fold, came a spate of novels warning High Churchmen against such extremism. Enemies of the Oxford Movement had counterattacked even before the defection of Newman, Manning and other Tractarians; Dr. Maison graphically entitles her chapter on this phase of the novelistic wars—"Surpliced Vipers and Silly Women: The Portrait by the Enemy."

Though High Churchmen were also held up to ridicule by agnostics, their most persistent opposition came from the Low Church or Protestant wing of Anglicanism. Actually, the Low Church party or Evangelical Movement had been spreading its revivalist doctrine in semi-fictional tracts for at least a generation before the Oxford Movement was launched by John Keble in 1833. In spite of this longer tradition, most Low Church fiction disappoints Dr. Maison; there is a valid sociological reason why Low Church means low-brow: the Evangelical Movement originated with the middle and

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lower classes and worked its way upward, spreading what Matthew Arnold called "Philistinism" by its puritanical hostility to the arts.

The Broad Church favored doctrinal flexibility, social conscience, and "muscular Christianity." Charles Kingsley was its most celebrated novelist; both he and Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's School Days,* produced books that were admirable reading for healthy boys, if not for sickly adults. The breadth of the Broad Church reached far enough to the left for it to encompass, temporarily at least, not a few agnostics.

After six chapters on the Anglicans, Dr. Maison moves on to the Catholic Church. This consideration divides naturally into two chapters: one on the novel of conversion, including Newman's autobiographical *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert;* the other, bearing the revealing title *The Wicked Jesuit and Company,* describes the anti-Catholic novel. "Few modern horror comics could equal in crudity, sadism, hysteria and blood-curdling violence the story of Jesuits in popular Victorian fiction." Even Kingsley, a history professor, contributed to this travesty, but Thackeray in *Henry Esmond* and J. H. Shorthouse in *John Inglesant,* which Dr. Maison calls "the most famous religious novel of the century," worked hard to counteract it.

After a brief chapter on Nonconformist fiction, Dr. Maison passes from "Orthodox Faith" to "Lost Faith." Among the Victorian novelists, as among the poets, the loss of faith was often a subject for tragedy or at any rate for pathos. In proof of this Dr. Maison devotes a whole chapter to Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and two novels by William Hale White, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* and *The Deliverance of Mark Rutherford.* She also reminds us that some Victorians rejoiced at losing their faith, notably the hero of Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* and his creator.

The third and last section of the book, entitled "Towards Unorthodox Faith," contains three chapters: "Towards Beauty," "Towards Goodness," and "Towards Truth." The "religion" of aestheticism is represented chiefly by Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean;* the second chapter concerns the many novels which preach the Social Gospel; while the third examines those novelists who thirst after "some simple and direct inspiration from Christ himself, or from a divine source." Laudable as this final aspiration sounds, it has degenerated into a formula for best-sellers; indeed, it was one from the first. New Testament fiction, from *Ben Hur* and *In His Steps* on, has paid real wages to increasingly dubious virtue. The highly logical structure of Dr. Maison's book and its less logical confinement to Victorian Britain force her to conclude with the fantastic Marie Corelli, whose *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) "had an initial sale greater than that of any previous English novel."

Dr. Maison has written a book full of wit, humor and good sense. Some readers may feel that her respect for sincerity has prevented her from treating a good deal of silly and vulgar writing with all the harshness it deserves. Nevertheless, by avoiding the facile irony of a Lytton Strachey, she has deepened our understanding of the Victorian mind and heart as well as the social scene.

A Lesser Form

Tales of the Don. By Mikhail Sholokhov. Knopf. $4.50.
Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories. By John Updike. Knopf. $4.
An Unavoidable Delay and Twelve Other Stories. By Diana Athill. Doubleday. $4.50.

by Bruce A. Cook

IF, AS some critics claim, the novel is dying a slow and nasty death in the twentieth century, nothing of the sort can be said of the short story. This stepchild of the novel has grown to flourishing maturity in our uncertain age, and as yet shows no signs of decay. This is not to say that there is more *art* created within the limits of the form today than there was, say, in the second or third decade of this century; but we do have a *general* rise in the quality of writing, the craft of the short story having matured so in the past sixty years, that the form has taken on an identity altogether separate and distinct from the novel.

We have only to look at Mikhail Sholokhov's collection, *Tales of the Don,* to see just how far the short story has come. Although these stories have only just been published in America, they are far from new. Actually, they represent Sholokhov's earliest work, written between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one, and printed in Russia between 1924 and 1926. They are, as we might expect, tales of the Revolution and Civil War, grisly anecdotes of fratricide and patricide which served him as notes and exercises in preparation for his great, long work, *The Silent Don.* The grand themes of that novel are in the stories, but stated so baldly and unambiguously that reading through the collection is a bit like listening to a phonograph that plays one record ("The Internationale") over and over again.

Of course not all the stories are equally bad. Generally, the longer ones are better. (It seems that Sholokhov must have the space of a novel to do justice to any theme or character.) Best of all is the longest story: "The Way and the Road." But even this one—like the rest—is marred (almost disfigured) by Sholokhov's maudlin Marxist sentiment and his relentless use of hero-villain political stereotypes. What does peep through all this horse opera nonsense is Sholokhov's feeling for the Russian land and its people. It was this feeling, of course, that made *The Silent Don* the great book it is, probably, as someone has said, the greatest nineteenth-century novel written in the twentieth century. But while we may be able to read nineteenth-century novels today, nineteenth-century short stories (as these are) simply will not do. Too much surface; not enough depth. Each of these Don tales of Sholokhov's has plot and action enough for a full-length novel. They are simply not what we *mean* by short stories.

What we do mean by short stories is well shown in John Updike's second collection, *Pigeon Feathers.* By

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this time, everyone must know about him. He has published two novels—*The Poorhouse Fair* and *Rabbit, Run*—a book of verse and another collection of stories, which together have established him as one of the toughest young talents in America today. The stories in *Pigeon Feathers* will not detract a bit from his golden reputation.

In his dedication to novelist William Maxwell, Updike quotes a long passage from Kafka's "Report to an Academy." It begins, "In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. . . . " With each of these stories, the author seems to press harder against that door of memory, trying to push it down altogether. No civil wars and no patricides, but, in each, an effort to hold the moment once lived and make it live again. A pattern emerges: a boy grows up in Pennsylvania, father and mother both schoolteachers, mother, German, grandmother, very German. As a young man, he goes to an art school in London. Later he works in New York; he is married, has three children. He is now a writer who lives in Massachusetts.

Such a pattern is John Updike's, of course. I'm not suggesting that each of these is a little fragment of autobiography, but I do think that taken together the stories in *Pigeon Feathers* give us a much more personal, more autobiographical statement than anything else he has written.

The short story, of course, is a lesser form than the novel. This is true in a more subtle way than might at first appear. For the short story is less than the novel not only in length and incident but, as written today, in the fact that it deals with lesser characters and lesser passions. It is neither the length of the Sholokhov stories nor their abundance of incident which so dates them, excludes them from the Twentieth Century; it is rather the inflated quality of many of the characters (the Communists) and their ponderous heroics which seem so out of joint. (Dealing with roughly the same material, Isaac Babel did much to shape the matter and form of the short story.) And so, no matter how highly we may regard the subtlety and depth of perception shown in John Updike's *Pigeon Feathers,* we must admit that they are essentially limited in their scope and intensity. Further, these essential limitations are even more apparent in the short stories of a writer such as Diana Athill.

According to the dust jacket, Miss Athill's collection, *An Unavoidable Delay,* is made up of "stories of love, superb in characterization and beautifully structured and written." Right enough, I suppose, but add that these who are so superbly characterized are creatures of miniscule dimensions whose loves teeter dangerously near that variety frequently described in the pages of ladies' magazines.

If Miss Athill's people have a passion, it would seem to be fear. *Angst* is made incarnate in her best stories, "An Afternoon Off" and "For Rain It Hath a Friendly Sound." In the first, a youngish publishing executive impulsively takes an afternoon off for a walk around London; on the way, he comes face to face with himself, and is shattered by despair at his own dreary visage. In the second, a happy and successful infidelity forces a wife to recognize the barrenness of her life. But still—fear, despair, barrenness—is this passion or its absence?

Documented Bias

Some of my Best Friends . . . By Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.50.

by Nat Hentoff

WHEN I was a boy in a middle-class Jewish ghetto of Boston, I took for granted, as did my friends, that if we survived Father Charles E. Coughlin's more energetic disciples, we would find it hard to get into certain schools and harder to be "accepted" in certain professions. We also knew there were neighborhoods we could forget about living in, and our mothers often added this fierce shibboleth for our journey into the outside world: "Don't try to

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be friends with the *goyim*, because they don't want to be friends with you."

What this book says is that while the situation has improved considerably, there remains a considerable amount of quietly effective anti-Semitism in business, housing, education and social life in our bristlingly heterogeneous country. Benjamin Epstein is National Director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith and Arnold Foster is the League's general counsel and director of its civil rights division. They have the files, the statistical citations from other experts, and a few case histories to prove what all Jews know. (More case histories, incidentally, would have made the book—written in a justifiedly pained, hortatory style—more readable.)

The book is useful as a compact educative weapon, and I'd suggest that a philanthropist might send a free copy to all state and federal legislators as well as to the heads of most of the nation's banks, life insurance companies, real estate firms and public utilities. An accompanying note might cite satirist Lenny Bruce's point: "O.K., my family killed Him, but oughtn't there to be a statute of limitations?"

Some of My Best Friends is inevitably filled with ironies, such as the case of the Merchants Club in New York, which has excluded Jews since its founding in 1871. It's a social club, say its directors, and its members, therefore, have the right to decide who their friends should be. But to gain tax exemptions, the Merchants Club declares itself a business organization. Of course, it is both, and the Jewish merchants who are not allowed inside are that much further removed from the decision-making power structure of certain industries. Those Jews are also psychologically injured. (When Jews are "clannish," the book points out, the stimulus for such defensive grouping has usually been initiated by the Christian community.) And the most deleterious result of all prejudice, the authors continue, is that "discriminatory actions and attitudes of parents have an impact on the experiences—and consequently the attitudes—of their children."

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Epstein and Forster make clear their recognition that "discrimination is only an irritant for an American who is a Jew . . ., not a crippling disability as it is for the American who is a Negro." The primary answer to most forms of exclusion, they correctly maintain, is more state and federal laws with more teeth. Also required is more diligent encouragement to the victims of discrimination to complain. Injured, prideful silence is a bootless, irresponsible luxury. When state agencies don't exist, there are the Urban League, the NAACP, and the Anti-Defamation League. As the ADL, for example, has discovered, ". . . often personnel officers in large firms are practicing discrimination in hiring without the knowledge of—in fact, against the actual desires of—top management."

And even more unprejudiced top management doesn't know what's happening below stairs because a large percentage of its members unthinkingly belong to restricted private clubs and live in neighborhoods where Jews, not to mention Negroes, are decidedly unwelcome. The power elite that is Christian is usually as limited in its knowledge of the social realities of the rest of the population as Jews are of the inner councils of most of the prestigious private city and country clubs.

The reason, in sum, for the pervasiveness and durability of prejudice is, largely, most people's comfortable unawareness of their own complicity in its existence. The readers of this journal, for instance, assuredly consider themselves unprejudiced, and some of their best friends may be Negroes; but how many live in apartment buildings or in neighborhoods where Negroes can, as a matter of course, find a place to live for which they can pay?

History and Fiction

Massacre at Montségur. By Zoé Oldenbourg. Pantheon. $6.95.

by Leonard F. X. Mayhew

THE RESERVE and, at best, conditional approbation with which professional historians customarily greet even good historical novels are familiar. A somewhat less frequent and thereby more interesting situation arises when the positions are reversed and the historical novelist turns historian. The good historical novelist—and Mme. Oldenbourg is one of the best—must possess certain highly specialized skills which are governed by certain definite rules. Within their limitations, however, he can improvise and shift emphases to obtain the effects he desires. In other words, he is free to impose his own point of view and create his own terms of dramatic conflict.

Within this genre of literature, Zoé Oldenbourg has an unsurpassed sense of the high Middle Ages and a sure instinct for its peculiar virtues and vices. This, plus her thorough familiarity with historical data, provides her novels with an authenticity of background against which her characters are able to stand up. *The World Is Not Enough* and *The Cornerstone* have firmly established her ability to tell a remarkably moving story in terms of medieval history.

All of this willingly granted, we are still very far from history *ut sic* —and what a complex notion that is! A more effective criterion to clarify the distinction between history and historical fiction could hardly be found than Miss Oldenbourg's present work. In recording and interpreting so complicated and diffuse an episode as the Albigensian crusade, a historian is not absolutely free to create the terms of reference and the conditions of drama according to inclination. If there is drama, adventure, conflict or tragedy inherent in a given situation, it must be portrayed as it existed, whether or not it fits the neat categories of a particular art form. The interpretation of events, personalities and ideas must rest on as thorough and unbiased a knowledge of facts as is attainable. This Miss Oldenbourg has not accomplished—or even seriously attempted. She has given us an adventure story, complete with good guys and bad guys as clearly distinguished as "Gunsmoke" ever thought to depict them.

The Albigensian Crusade was as fierce and tragic an occurrence as

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history can show. Nevertheless, some of the men responsible for it were people of humanity, reason and sophistication—not to mention conscience. That the heresy which they saw as a mortal threat to the very tissue of secular and spiritual society could really have been the innocuous and exalted spiritual movement Miss Oldenbourg makes it seems improbable on the face of it.

She admits frequently that very little trustworthy documentation exists from which to draw a true picture of the Catharist heresy which flourished in southern France during the twelfth century. Yet she confidently presents it as a movement embodying the highest moral, religious and humanitarian ideals. On the other hand, it is obvious that there is no lack of documentation of Catholic doctrine from this period. Yet very many of her statements of Catholic teaching are wildly inaccurate and biased so that it is difficult to accept the unsupported picture when the documented one is so faulty.

As irritating as errors of fact may be, biased editorializing which masquerades as historical interpretation is, if possible, infinitely worse. The range extends here from pretentious absurdity to petty sarcasm. Trying at one point to show Catholicism and Catharism as logical and theological cousins, the author pontificates that "any purely Christian contribution to the love of creation has been weak in impulse and wholly theoretical." The Albigensian Crusade, according to Mme. Oldenbourg, "was to destroy, for ever, the moral authority of the Church." The doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is lightly dismissed as "that apocryphal tradition." What grudging praise the author has for St. Dominic and his austere friars is accompanied by sarcasm and unsubstantiated presumption of their personal lack of humane qualities.

Mme. Oldenbourg apparently preconceived her "history" as an anachronistic apologia for certain liberal notions of self-determination and a defense of the culture of medieval Languedoc. A very cogent case can undoubtedly be made to this end, but not at the expense of the record.

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ART

Style over Geometry

A FASCINATING and delightful thing to observe is the persistence of individual style in even the most extreme and severe forms of geometric abstraction. The most determined effort to pursue what is loosely called the ideal of "pure art," or what might be called an effort to turn art into a science, is circumvented by the ego's irresistible vitality; at the very least, an individual syntax remains. The ego of the artist takes a lot of punishment, but it is never quite knocked out. When it is an ego with talent it comes through all the clearer, perhaps, for the stern limits within which it works.

Before misunderstandings arise, it should be added that the artists who succeed in creating works of art in this idiom—and I think no one can deny that there are such artists—are those to whom the idiom is organically (shall we say) congenial. It is for this reason more than any other that most of the arguments for and against abstract art is absurd.

Whether or not abstract art is congenial to other artists or to the observer or the critic, whether or not theoretically one can say it is a "dead end" as a mode of expression, the fact is that certain gifted artists today express themselves most successfully in creating works of art that are called abstract. Their particular gifts are such that this is the best way for them to declare themselves—or at least they convince one that it is.

It seems to me it would be a sorehead indeed who would insist that Calder or Lippold change his tune; particularly since, no matter what happens in the art of the future, they don't seem to be running out of ideas for themselves right now. Also, no matter what mediocre artists are doing in this vein, the first-rate talents shine out with all the particularity of their individual style, even in a Euclidean firmament.

This firmament is genially exhibited at the Whitney Museum until May 13th, in a show entitled "Geometric Abstraction in America," which will be seen later in othe parts of the country. "Geometric Ab straction" is more severe a disciplin than "Abstract Expressionism" c "Abstract Impressionism"—at lea it confines the ego more. Yet loo how Calder comes through! Wedge of color are strung on wires in certain balance: formal delicac precise and evocative rhythms pluc poetry right out of the air. De River evolves a more stately, sinuou movement with his revolving molc ed metals; the shell-like *Constructio Blue and Black* in the exhibit is nc a typical one, but it has the enfolc ing deliberate pace that is charac teristic of the artist. If Calder pluck poetry out of the air and De River traces it langorously in space, Rich ard Lippold catches it shimmerin in a net, a grille, a cage: he cap tures the glow of mathematica beauties in his spidery, intricate geo metrical webs.

Among the painters of geometri abstractions there are lots that sim ply tread water, imitating those fa mous founding fathers of the move ment, Mondrian and Kandinsky. Bu when Arthur Dove took this turn, ghost of emotion dapples the pla of shapes, the edges waver, the colo also sounds a wistful flutelike not that is hauntingly his own. Ellswort Kelly is a bold large-scale fellow: h pushes the limitations of this kin of painting to the limit, but wit some sleight of hand—a slight warp ing of the edge of one bold colc against another, the conjuring up c a distinct exuberant form; it is surprise—like a graceful fat mar Stuart Davis is always fresh, sharp sprightly—jazzy, as everyone re marks. Josef Albers strikes a resc

Geometric Abstraction in America Exhibit Schedule

June 4-July 15, 1962: Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boston.
Nov. 19-Dec. 31, 1962: Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica, N.Y.
Jan. 14-Feb. 24, 1963: City Art Museum, St. Louis, Mo.
March 25-April 30, 1963: Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio.

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iant, echoing note with hallucinatory squares of color.

It seems that, with artists at least, o "know thyself" is a grace that is given. A style is not a repetition of manner, although among many abtract artists this is a common fallacy; it is a native *élan*, an irrepressible personal diction in speaking whatever language is employed. And within geometric abstraction the miracle of the creative style of a irst-rate artist is thrown into grateful relief. It appears to prove, among other things, that no matter how diligently the ideal of "pure art" is pursued, "impurities" in the way of symbols, allusions, attitudes and even "opinions" will creep in at the back door if not invited in at the front.

Only theory can be pure, perhaps, not life or art. The dream of Malarmé to write a poem that contained only poetry was never realized, and T. S. Eliot recognized that "If you aim only at poetry in poetry, here is no poetry either." If nature is banished from art, if man's image goes, memory and temperament hold fast. As long as an artist is an artist creating a work of art—no matter how formal, how de-natured and dehumanized—his style, his informing spirit persists. Thus it is that the spirits of a distinguished and distinctive group of American artists seem to prosper within the framework of Geometric Abstraction. This, and not any theoretical or intellectual basis, is its *raison d'être*.

BETTY KAUFMAN

REVIEWERS

Walker Percy is a frequent contributor to these pages. His novel *The Moviegoer* received the 1962 National Book Award.

James R. Mellow, a frequent contributor of articles on art to this and other journals, is Editor of *Arts Magazine*.

Vivian Mercier teaches English and Comparative Literature at City College, New York.

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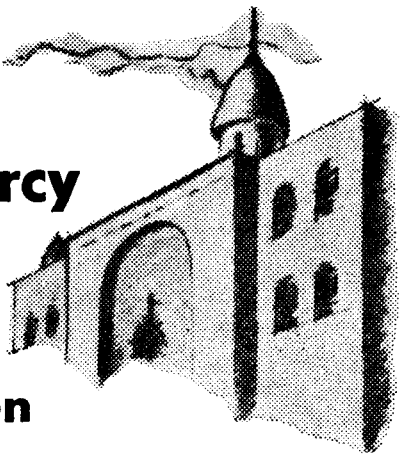

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